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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KUWAIT 004372

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/ARPI, LONDON FOR TSOU, PARIS FOR ZEYA

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [KU](#) [SUCCESSION](#)

SUBJECT: AMIR VOTE OF CONFIDENCE IN KUWAITI PM AFTER
LEADING FAMILY CRITIC CALLS FOR TRIPARTITE COMMITTEE TO
"ASSIST THE LEADERSHIP"

REF: KUWAIT 4264 (AND PREVIOUS)

Classified By: Ambassador Richard LeBaron for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1. (C) Summary: National Guard Chief Shaykh Salem Al-Ali created the sensation of the early Ramadan season by suggesting publicly that a three-party ruling family committee be formed "to assist" Prime Minister Shaykh Sabah. Faced with this high level sniping, Shaykh Sabah was the recipient of a vote of confidence Monday night by the Amir, (reportedly sound of mind if not body), and rumors abound that the PM will soon be made Crown Prince. Feuding between the Salem and Jaber branches of the ruling family is nothing new, but it only rarely pops up in the press, usually with Shaykh Salem Al-Ali as the spokesman for the dissenters. Although the rumor mill is full of speculation that the PM could be granted the Crown Prince title soon, once the dust settles on this current incident, we are more likely to see continued muddling through. (End Summary)

Shaykh Salem Calls for Tripartite Committee

2. (SBU) In an October 10 interview with Arabic-language daily Al-Qabas, National Guard Chief and fourth highest-ranking ruling family member Shaykh Salem Al-Ali Al-Salem Al-Sabah called for the formation of a three-member ruling family committee to "assist the leadership" of the Amir and the Crown Prince, both of whom have serious health issues. Shaykh Salem suggested the committee include himself, Prime Minister Shaykh Sabah Al-Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, and nephew of the Amir Shaykh Mubarak Abdullah Al-Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, who does not currently hold a government post.

3. (SBU) Shaykh Salem said in the interview, "The present situation is wrong and we should not remain silent. From my position in the ruling family, I must draw attention to this serious constitutional flaw in which procedures outlined by the constitution and law are not being observed. Legislation must pass through proper constitutional channels." He also criticized Minister for Amiri Diwan Affairs Shaykh Nasser Mohammed Al-Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah for "carrying out functions not within his prerogatives." "It is incorrect and illogical that he should take decisions unilaterally," he added. "The responsibility (is) on the elders, who should not leave things as they are and leave the ship to be led by the corrupt and yes-men," Shaykh Salem concluded. (Note: Such public criticism of top Government officials, particularly from a leading royal family member, is extremely rare in Kuwait, where the ruling family prefers to keep its disputes behind closed doors. However, Shaykh Salem al-Ali has taken to the press before and is the public voice of chronic problems between the Salem and Jaber branches of the Al-Sabah family. End note.)

Amir: "Complete Trust in Prime Minister

4. (C) The Government reacted quickly to Shaykh Salem's statements. Under headlines of "Amir Backs Shaykh Sabah," English-language dailies reported October 11 that the Amir summoned National Assembly Speaker Jassem Al-Khorafi to a meeting October 10 during which the Amir re-affirmed his "complete trust" in the Prime Minister, who also attended the meeting along with Shaykh Nasser and Deputy Chief of the National Guard and brother to the Amir Shaykh Mishal Al-Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah; Shaykh Salem was noticeably absent. According to press reports, the Amir told Al-Khorafi he would "take a decisive measure that would serve Kuwait's interests, security, and stability," a statement some observers suggest could indicate an imminent change in one of the government's top leaders. We have also heard from sources close to Shaykh Sabah that the Amir privately reassured Shaykh Sabah of his backing.

5. (C) Press also reported that Al-Khorafi called National Assembly members (MPs) to an emergency meeting October 11. Al-Khorafi's Office Director Waleed Razzaq told Poloff 35-38 MPs attended the emergency meeting, which lasted 30-45 minutes. The purpose of the "consultative meeting" was to convey the Amir's support for the Prime Minister to the MPs,

Razzaq said. (Note: Per Article 8 of the Succession Law, if the Crown Prince "loses the health ability to exercise his powers," the Amir should refer the matter to the National Assembly, which must verify the Amir's assessment and vote to remove and replace the Crown Prince "in a special closed-door session." End note.)

16. (C) Comment: The divisions revealed by Shaykh Salem's comments are linked to historic rivalries within the ruling family. Uncertainties created by the lingering ill-health of both the Amir and Crown Prince have fueled internecine rivalries. Many contacts have noted that the relative decline of the Salem branch, represented by the Crown Prince, has led to fears that the Amir and Prime Minister's Jabir branch of the ruling family is monopolizing positions of power. The Amir's response to Shaykh Salem's statements may indicate he is prepared to replace the ailing Crown Prince with Prime Minister Shaykh Sabah, re-uniting the offices of Crown Prince and Prime Minister, which were separated in 2002. Some of our contacts believe such a shift will come as soon as Shaykh Salem returns from a long stay in the UK. However, we have heard such rumors before, and after the dust settles on the recent public exchanges, there will be less motivation to take difficult steps. End comment.

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